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Mental health in times of COVID-19. Technology as a supporting tool

Salud mental en tiempos de COVID-19. La tecnología como herramienta de soporte

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As a result of the outbreak of the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, and its declaration as a pandemic by the World Health Organization, global health systems have established measures of social isolation and border closures in order to reduce the spread of the virus. This situation generates anguish and anxiety in the population, which requires urgent measures of support and psychological help.[1]

Preliminary studies describe that medical personnel suffers "emotional trauma" episodes due to the high risk of infection, protective equipment deficit, overwork, discrimination and isolation, which impacts on their decision-making and correct labor performance. In the general population, post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms have increased from 4 to 41 %, depression is observed in 7 %, and cases of self-medication poisoning have been reported.[2]

In current situation, technology allows greater access to emotional support, through the use from mobile phone apps, to courses and free online counseling, in order to help understand and control the emotions generated by confinement. Various countries have incorporated services for emergency intervention in cases of psychological crises: in Peru, psychological care and first aid measures have been proposed for health personnel; experts in the field have been called in Chile and Brazil, and recommendations, mobile applications and helplines have been generated, arranged by risk groups, in order to maintain the humanity of the response team, provide clear information and not generating panic.[1,3,4] Although apps or remote counseling do not fully replace personal care, their use has shown benefits in chronic diseases, in addition to some advantages: less saturation in health facilities, less exposure to the virus and reduction in the cost of care.[4,5]

A systematic search was conducted in Android and Apple app stores, as well as Google, looking for apps and online course platforms until June, using the key terms "*salud mental*", "*coronavirus*", "*COVID-19*" and "*aplicaciones*", as well as their translations into English (mental health, coronavirus, COVID-19 and apps). Those that address mental health as the main topic, that were access-free, created during the current pandemic and that can be used regardless of the geographical area of residence, were registered (Table 1). Although technological support is not yet ideal, efforts are being made to strengthen these services that complement medical care.

The COVID-19 outbreak has shown that comprehensive deployment of an emergency system for psychological intervention is required in case of epidemics, which have negative effects on people's mental health, even on those without prior mental disorders.[5] Today more than ever it is evident that collective effort and comprehensive support will be decisive to face one of the most important health challenges of recent times.

Table 1. Apps and online courses about COVID-19 and mental health

Name	Supplier	Language	Description
Web and mobile phone apps			
Here for You-Snapchat	Snap Inc	English-Spanish	Offers local experts' information to users looking for mental health-related information.
Gestioemocional.cat	Catalonian Health Service	Spanish	Evaluation and access to emotional resources by means of the use of questionnaires.
COVID Coach	National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder-United States	English	Exercises to cope with stress and anxiety during confinement.
Jenny	Mindful, S.A.P.I. de C.V.	Spanish	It includes a special COVID-19 module that offers the users guidance to deal with emotional symptoms caused by confinement
Online courses			
Primera Ayuda Psicológica (PAP) en el manejo de emergencias (COVID-19)-2020	Pan-American Health Organization	Spanish	Aimed at the general public, it focuses on detection and initial management of psychological emergencies within the context of the pandemic
Mental and Behavioral Health: COVID-19 Healthcare Hub	Elsevier Publishing House	English	Aimed at health professionals, it provides training in the main mental health topics
Resilience Skills in a Time of Uncertainly	University of Pennsylvania	English	Aimed at the general public, it incorporates resilience into personal and professional life during the pandemic
Mind Control: Managing your Mental Health During COVID-19	University of Toronto	English-Spanish	Aimed at the general public, it provides support to cope with anxiety in times of social isolation.
Primeros Auxilios Psicológicos (PAP)-Edición especial COVID-19	Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona	Spanish	Aimed at health professionals and the public in general, to effectively respond to the emotional impact caused by the pandemic.
COVID19: Comunicarnos Sin Daño Durante la Pandemia	Pontificia Universidad Javeriana	Spanish	Aimed at the general public, it addresses communication and how it affects mental health.
COVID-19: Psychological Impact, Wellbeing and Mental Health	Maudsley Learning	English	Directed to the general public, it addresses the personal and social impact caused by COVID19.
Anxiety in Children and Young People during COVID-19	University of East Anglia	English	Aimed at health professionals and the general public, it addresses strategies in cases of anxiety in young people.
COVID-19: Helping Young People Manage Low Mood and Depression	University of Reading	English	Aimed at the general public to help young people adapt during the pandemic.
Motivation and Engagement in an Uncertain World	Coventry University	English	Aimed at the general public to cope with the impact of the pandemic.
Managing Mental Health and Stress	Coventry University	English	Aimed at the general public on the effects of social isolation.
Work-Life Balance and the Impact of Remote Working	Coventry University	English	Aimed at the general public to mitigate the effects of remote work.
Social Care during COVID-19: Coping with Self-Isolation and Social Distancing	The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust	English	Aimed at vulnerable groups' caregivers, for the management of social isolation.

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